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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000515

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SUBJECT: CABINET RESHUFFLE: POWER STRUGGLE OR GOVERNMENT
RATIONALIZATION?

REF: DOHA 475 (NOTAL)

Classified By: CDA MICHAEL A. RATNEY, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Consequences of the July 1 Cabinet re-shuffle (reftel) continue to be unclear, but Qataris and expat observers have begun analyzing the shifts in an attempt to determine who won and who lost among Qatar,s major power brokers. On the face of it, the creation of several new ministries and the re-ordering of others re-centralizes the Government by folding formerly independent bodies into ministries that answer to the Prime Minister. Some observers view this as a gain for PM Hamed bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) at the expense of the Amir,s wife, Sheikha Mozah, who had championed the creation of these independent agencies, and the Amir,s son, the Heir Apparent, who did not acquire additional responsibilities. Others see it not as a power struggle between these two camps, but as a way for the Amir to demonstrate to his population that the concerns of ordinary Qataris remain first and foremost in his mind as the nation amasses massive wealth. What is clear for the moment is that few Qataris, even those in positions of responsibility, know just what the Amir,s motivations were for changing the Cabinet, or how lines of authority will eventually shake out. END SUMMARY

Who,s Up and Who,s Down?

¶2. (C) Given the level of self-censorship among Qatari media, there has been no discussion in the local press about implications of the Cabinet shake-up. But in private conversations, Qataris and long-term expatriates are trying to read the tea leaves to understand what each major power center in the Qatari establishment gained and lost. Some contacts have speculated that the re-shuffle has strengthened HBJ,s hand vis--vis Sheikha Mozah and her son, the Heir Apparent, Sheikh Tamim, because the Prime Minister theoretically now has more ministers and agencies reporting to him. Others, however, see these changes as largely cosmetic, since Tamim did not lose any responsibilities and remains in control of the military, security and intelligence organs.

¶3. (C) Another consequence of the reorganization suggests that HBJ may have his power base diluted in an area where he enjoyed substantial influence: foreign affairs. (NOTE: HBJ is concurrently Foreign Minister and Prime Minister.) The creation of the Ministry of International Cooperation (MIC), to be headed by former head of the National Human Rights Committee Khalid Al-Attayah, may see some functions previously handled at MFA shift to the MIC. Some diplomats, journalists and political observers view the MIC,s creation as a potential means, over time, to reduce HBJ,s control over foreign affairs, with some observers going as far as to

say that this is the first stage of a broader plan of the Amir to reduce HBJ,s international influence, strip him eventually of his title as Foreign Minister (even if he remains Prime Minister) and pave the way for a broader role for Tamim in foreign affairs. Khalid Al-Attiah is generally perceived as a threat to HBJ,s authority in foreign affairs, because his) and his father,s -- demonstrated loyalty to the Amir has afforded the family a measure of independence from HBJ.

¶4. (C) The education sector, a major part of Sheikha Mozah,s responsibilities as head of the Qatar Foundation, also seems to have been protected from HBJ,s influence. Dr. Sheikha al-Misned, President of Qatar University, and Richard Darilek, the head of RAND Corporation,s Doha office, told PD Officers that the Supreme Education Council (SEC) would report &directly to the Amir8 and that plans were still on track to fold the Ministry of Education into the SEC by year,s end.

And What Does It All Mean?

¶5. (C) Darilek conceded that "something had to be done" about the centrifugal forces pulling the Government in disparate directions. The proliferation of supreme councils and independent bodies had blurred lines of communication and responsibility. Restructuring the government by creating new ministries was meant to not only make it easier for HBJ to task organizations and follow up on their work, but also to give a seat at the Cabinet table to groups that had thus far

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been absent. The Minister of Environment, for example, will now participate in Cabinet meetings, whereas the former Supreme Council for the Environment did not have that "privilege." Dr. al-Misned speculated that the moves may have been less about HBJ and more about preparing the ground for eventual parliamentary elections (which look unlikely before at least 2010). "Ministers can be called before Parliament and questioned,8 she said, &but independent bodies cannot."

¶6. (C) Separately, the Chief Editor of Arabic daily "Al Watan," a Qatari who professes to be close to Sheikh Tamim, expressed the same view to PAO. "No Parliament in Qatar is going to question the Amir, the Heir Apparent or Sheikha Mozah, so councils headed by them need a minister who can be expected to answer to the Parliament," he explained. Asked if this would include the Prime Minister, the Editor replied, "Normally, the Prime Minister should not be considered untouchable by the Parliament."

¶7. (C) None of Embassy,s contacts appears to have a solid idea of how the responsibilities of the new ministries will turn out. In a July 14 meeting, MFA,s third-ranking official, Mohamad Al-Rumaihi, told Charge that it was not clear to him what role the MIC would play. Al-Rumaihi observed that the MFA already had a functioning office devoted to international organizations, and it made sense for Minister Al-Attiah to draw on those resources without moving them to the MIC. Al-Rumaihi gave the impression that some MFA functions may move to the MIC, and he himself may be disappointed that that he was not named, as had been speculated, to head the new entity.

Possible Motivations

¶8. (C) An established expat businessman with ties to senior government officials told P/E Chief that viewed from a Qatari perspective, the Cabinet re-shuffle is a rejection of the "decentralization model" of government propounded by Sheikha Mozah and the RAND Corporation. The majority of Qataris, he noted, are not making money at the same rate as the country's elites. Most Qataris do not see the benefit of Qatar,s

rapid economic growth and instead are suffering from increasingly high inflation. Meanwhile, they gripe about having to speak English to third country nationals in their own country, and want to stick with tradition in the face of rapid change.

¶9. (C) It particularly galls these conservative elements of society that Sheikha Mozah appears in the press as a fashionable "movie star" who, in the eyes of most Qataris, is the force behind the rapid pace of change that now permeates Qatari life. In this context, the Cabinet re-shuffle is viewed by Qataris as the Amir,s rejection of that model and a retreat from Americanization. In this businessman,s view, the Amir needed to strike down the decentralization model because it was arousing Qatari ire and not achieving many visible benefits. He stressed that the Amir,s move, however, does not suggest a lack of confidence in his wife,s counsel or any increased confidence in HBJ.

Comment

¶10. (C) Dr. Sheikha al-Misned may have summed up our contacts, views best when she said that &the Amir seems to be the only one in the Government who has a vision for this country.⁸ The details of that vision, however, are not entirely clear to anyone, except perhaps the Amir himself and his closest associates. As noted reftel and as confirmed by our contacts, none of Qatar,s major power brokers has seen a true shift in power through this Cabinet re-shuffle, suggesting that this may have been a mostly cosmetic move meant to placate Qataris who are increasingly frustrated with the pace of change around them and the fact that they do not seem to be directly benefitting from much of it. While this Cabinet re-shuffle may change little in the daily lives of Qataris, one consequence may be that Sheikha Mozah and her projects appear in the limelight a little less over the coming year, even while she continues to play an important role behind the scenes in Qatar,s social development and governance.
RATNEY